1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

321 Mosaic workers utilized stones of different colors and
324 shells of various kinds. Pure designs were common, but ele-
531 ments representing the costume or the body paint were
341 shown when the mosaic covered a figure in wood or stone. An application of mosaic on a larger scale was frequent in architecture, a veneer of cut stone being applied to the rubble of a platform or building. The temples of Mitla, Oaxaca, influenced by the same Mixteca-Puebla culture to which Aztec civilization owed its origin, are masterpieces of this technique, for individual blocks have their surfaces carved to fit together in an intricate geometric design.[9] (See Plate 11, bottom.)

322 The woodworkers, owing to the impermanence of their medium, have left little to exhibit their prowess, but the few surviving masks, idols, drums and *atl-atls*, or throwing boards, bear ample witness to their superb craftsmanship. The very fact that they had to work wood with stone tools makes their achievement noteworthy. Their copper tools were dull and unserviceable in cutting even the softer woods, and these implements came into use relatively late in Aztec times.[10] (See Plate 54, bottom.)

335 Wood was used extensively in buildings for roof beams and doorjambs. A beam in the palace at Texcoco was ninety feet long and five feet thick, so that its preparation and transport must have been an arduous task. There was probably little use of planks in Aztec building, since it would be difficult to prepare them with the rudimentary equipment at Aztec disposal, and adobes and plaster were easier to make and just
396 as serviceable. Wooden canoes, however, were essential for life in the lakes. Some were dugouts hollowed out by fire, but others, to judge from the type used by the Xochimilcan

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396 Indians today, were flat-bottomed punts, constructed of planks which were probably tied together in Aztec times
335 rather than pegged, as they are today. The portable bridges used to cross the canals were also simple combinations of planks, or planks resting on beams. (See Plate 35, bottom left.)

352 Furniture, which in European culture has done much honor to the woodworker, was little used in Mexico. Mats sufficed for beds and seats. High dignitaries sat on a sort of wooden throne which had legs and often a back and was called *icpalli*, from which the Mexican word *equipale* for a modern wickerwork and leather chair is derived. Mention
[353] is made of screens and chests and ornamental sheathing for room interiors, but no examples are left for us to judge their craftsmanship. (See Plate 37, top.)

534 The wooden drums, on which musicians beat out ceremonial rhythms, were handsomely carved, as befitted their religious use. There were two types, a vertically cylindrical drum (*huehuetl**), which had a skin head, and a horizontally cylindrical drum (*teponaztli*†), the top of which was slotted to form two tongues. While the notes differed, there was usually the same interval between the resonant sounds emitted when the tongues were struck. The task of reaching the pitch must have been excessively difficult, for the wood had to be hollowed by fire and then chiseled to a nicety. At times the artist fashioned these drums to represent a crouching
● 322 man or animal. Masks were often used in temple ceremonies when a god was impersonated, and ceremonial staffs were part of their equipment. So, also, were the throwing boards, or *atl-atls*, with which a warrior flung a javelin, the lengthen-

*way-wa'yti. †te-po-na'z-tli.

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ing of the arm thereby giving the missile an increased propulsive force. Some of these *atl-atls* were most delicately carved and represent the best of Aztec design. (See Plate 54, bottom.)

Metallurgy was in its infancy. Copper was cold-hammered; the art of adding alloys to make bronze had not reached Mexico from the south, but the gilding of copper and mixing of gold and copper were adopted by Mexican goldsmiths. Copper was cast into bells and ornaments, and the process, used also for gold, was the cire-perdue, or lost-wax, method. The desired shape was modeled in clay, over which was dusted finely ground charcoal, followed by an even layer of wax. This coating was also dusted with charcoal and the whole enclosed in clay, which was perforated at the top and bottom. The molten metal was poured in at the upper hole after the wax was melted and the lower orifice plugged. When the metal cooled the cast was broken and the finished object removed.[11] (See Plates 46–47.)

Although most of the native goldwork found its way to the Spanish melting pot, a few lovely ornaments survived; in 1932 the quantity was more than doubled by Dr Alfonso Caso's discovery of the undisturbed tomb of a high Mixtec official. The design and shape of these necklaces, earplugs and rings, by their sheer intricacy and bulk, make one realize that the Spanish descriptions of Cortes' loot understated the rich ability of the Aztec goldsmiths.[12]

Metalworking, without much question, had its origin in Ecuador or Peru, and various techniques were transmitted up the Pacific coast to Panama and Costa Rica, where important goldworking industries were founded. Although the intervening area produced little metal, another center was

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PLATE 54

AZTEC ART

TOP: Coatlicue, the Mother of the Gods, a highly important member of the pantheon. This representation, over eight feet high, displays her power in terms of such fearsome attributes as two snakeheads, a necklace of a skull, hands and hearts, a skirt of writhing snakes and claws on her feet. The bottom of the statue's feet is carved to represent the earth monster. BOTTOM: Wooden drum with two tongues (*teponaztli*) in the form of an ocelot. The smooth, simple outlines contrast with the macabre congestion of the presentation above.

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1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

carved from the solid rock cliff and is a marvelous blend of architectural design and sculptural skill.[8]

The Aztec sculptors worked in relief and in the round, in heroic and in miniature size, and were equally able in symbolic and naturalistic conceptions, which they could execute in whatever medium was available. Our modern appreciation of their work is hampered by the prominence of religious *motifs*, which often detract by crowded detail or grotesque fantasy from the clean lines of their basic proportions. Aztec art, we have insisted, was never completely secular. Yet, in compensation, the Aztecs allowed a lively appreciation of natural elements to enter purely religious conceptions wherever possible.

From the time of the Middle Cultures the Mexicans used baked clay extensively for sculpture and worked out in it their artistic standards. The few surviving examples of wooden sculpture suggest that this medium was carved in accordance with stone techniques and did not, as in Egypt and Greece, serve as a training ground for standards later transferred to stone. If anything, the plastic methods of Mexico had their origin in a long and continuous handling of clay. Both media entail an emphasis on surface and contour; and the technical process of reducing stone by pecking and polishing, if more laborious, is not, in the last analysis, very different from the final smoothing and finishing of a work in clay. Thus the sculptors achieved a delicate appreciation of the contours and lines of the human form.

Partly owing to the past tradition and partly because the images of the gods were set in the temples, the Aztec artists showed their figures in passive attitudes, more often seated than erect. The austerity of their life led the Aztecs to

11:Diaz T,H-5 (1519-1520) 1910
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deer, mallards, young dogs and other things of that sort in their part of the market, and let us also mention the fruiterers, and the women who sold cooked food, dough and tripe in their own part of the market; then every sort of pottery made in a thousand different forms from great water jars to little jugs, these also had a place to themselves; then those who sold honey and honey paste and other dainties like nut paste, and those who sold lumber, boards, cradles, beams, blocks and benches, each article by itself, and the vendors of *ocote*[1] firewood, and other things of a similar nature. I must furthermore mention, asking your pardon, that they also sold many canoes full of human excrement, and these were kept in the creeks near the market, and this they use to make salt or for tanning skins, for without it they say that they cannot be well prepared. I know well that some gentlemen laugh at this, but I say that it is so, and I may add that on all the roads it is a usual thing to have places made of reeds or straw or grass, so that they may be screened from the passers by, into these they retire when they wish to purge their bowels so that even that filth should not be lost. But why do I waste so many words in recounting what they sell in that great market, for I shall never finish if I tell it all in detail. Paper, which in this country is called *Amal*, and reeds scented with *liquidambar*, and full of tobacco, and yellow ointments and things of that sort are sold by themselves, and much cochineal is sold under the arcades which are in that great market place, and there are many vendors of herbs and other sorts of trades. There are also buildings where three magistrates sit in judgment, and there are executive officers like *Alguacils* who inspect the merchandise. I am forgetting those who sell salt, and those who make the stone knives, and how they split them

[1] Pitch-pine for torches